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NATURE CONSERVATION NEWS

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A New Threat -- EUROPEAN RABBITS IN THE U. S.

The European rabbit, one of the world's worst animal weeds, is being introduced into the United States. Some of the rabbits have already lived through one mild winter in northern Pennsylvania. Introductions are being made by sportsmen in various states. They are obtaining the rabbits from the San Juan Islands, off the coast of Washington, where colonies have existed for many years.

Missouri has long served as a supplier of native cottontail rabbits for stocking purposes in other states. This practice was recently halted, thus facilitating development of the San Juan rabbit supplying business.

Few pests have been more dramatically publicized than the European rabbit. The menace of this creature is so well recognized that federal law banning its importation was enacted more than half a century ago, though interstate shipment apparently is legal.

This rabbit is the beast that has devastated large areas in Australia and New Zealand. Damage that it causes amounts to many millions of dollars a year. Control efforts have been terrifically costly but largely futile. Myxomatosis recently has reduced numbers in Australia and Europe, but immune strains are already developing. This disease cannot be counted on for lasting control, and there is reason to think it might be ineffective in America.

We may feel that Australia and New Zealand offered something of a zoological vacuum to rabbits, and that in the U. S. the animals would be held down by hunting, predation, and disease. Possibly it would be kept within reasonable limits, but experience in Britain is not encouraging. There the rabbit is second only to the rat in damage done by vertebrate pests. Losses are valued at millions of pounds. Rabbits destroy field crops and seriously compete with livestock for pasturage. Intensive hunting pressure is deliberately brought to bear. Rabbiting is an important duty of those holding hunting rights. Control is also exerted through gassing, trapping, ferreting, and other means. There is little reason to hope that the situation would be different here.

The European rabbit is larger and eats much more than a cottontail. It is a great burrower. The burrows are highly undesirable in agricultural areas. It is entirely possible that the American farmer would be confronted with the worst vertebrate pest he has yet faced.

Those who are introducing or permitting introduction of European rabbits are taking a pointless gamble. If the animal succeeds it certainly will be a pest. If it fails or barely manages to hold on it will not be much of a game animal. And what chance would we have of exterminating this animal after it was well enough established to prove itself a pest?

The same federal law that bans importation, the Lacey Act, provides the best hope of stopping shipments of European rabbits. If the State of Washington will ban exportation of this rabbit, the Lacey Act automatically will come into effect to halt interstate shipment; shippers, carriers, and recipients will be liable. The matter may not be as simple as it sounds, for domestic rabbits such as Belgian hares are breeds of the same species, *Oryctolagus cuniculus*, and commercial breeders will naturally insist on legal provisions to protect their right of interstate shipment.

Perhaps it is already too late to prevent establishment. It is reported that eighteen dozen were released by sportsmen in one Pennsylvania county. We can only hope that state and federal officials will be able to act quickly enough, and that sportsmen will see the danger of such importations. Farmers and game officials should take every possible step to exterminate all European rabbits now at large in the United States.

Recent reports on this situation may be found in *Ohio Conservation Bulletin* for August 1954, *Pennsylvania Game News* for September, and *Science News Letter* for November 13.

A revision of the *Bibliography on the Introduction of Exotic Animals* is now available from Dr. Herbert W. Levi, Department of Zoology, University of Wisconsin, Madison 6. Dr. Levi is chairman of the Nature Conservancy Committee on Exotics.

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY 607 G STREET S. E. WASHINGTON 3, D. C.

ANNUAL MEETING REPORT

New members of the Board of Governors elected at the Gainesville meeting on September 7 include Adolph M. Stebler, Leader of the Oklahoma Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit, Stillwater; Dr. Armin K. Lobeck, Professor Emeritus of Geology, Columbia University; Dr. A. Starker Leopold, Associate Professor of Zoology, University of California; Mr. Ernest Brooks, Jr., Vice President of Old Dominion Foundation, Inc., and Mr. Devin A. Garrity, President of The Devin-Adair Company.

In addition to the new Governors, Conrad Chapman, F. Raymond Fosberg, S. Charles Kendeigh, E. Laurence Palmer, John E. Potzger, Richard H. Pough, Paul B. Sears, and Alvin G. Whitney were reelected to office.

Dr. Albert M. Reese, Professor Emeritus of the University of West Virginia, was elected to Honorary Membership. A biographical sketch of Dr. Reese appears elsewhere in this issue.

Other formal actions taken at the meeting included change of the fiscal year to begin July 1 instead of September 1, change of provisions for Patron membership so that future Patron contributions may be placed in the general fund and that Patrons shall not automatically be made life members, and adoption of a provision in the by-laws establishing an endowment fund.

PROJECTS AND UNITS

Important developments are occurring in many of the natural area preservation projects currently underway. The next issue of *Nature Conservation News* will carry reports on these projects; due to space limitations we can only mention progress being made on some of these in this issue. Mettler's Woods is reported elsewhere herein. Sunken Forest is well along toward completion. The Dome Island project, started last summer, has now raised $4,714 of its $20,000 goal. A new project, preservation of Mianus River Gorge in Connecticut and Westchester County, N. Y., is well begun. A drive for the preservation of Mamacoke Island under the administration of Connecticut College is progressing well. Perhaps the most exciting news is the recent announcement that a large additional tract of virgin cypress at the northern end of Corkscrew Swamp in Collier County, Florida, has been saved through the joint efforts of Richard H. Pough, president of the Nature Conservancy, and John H. Baker, president of the National Audubon Society. The area is being purchased for $145,000 and it will be managed by the Audubon Society.

A Long Island Chapter organizing meeting was held on October 29, with 46 members present. The new chapter was officially chartered on November 10. This group is off to a fine start with Robert Cushman Murphy as chairman and an excellent group of co-workers on the Board of Trustees. The group is laying plans for an extensive preservation program on Long Island. Formation of the chapter has resulted in an increase in membership and interest. Many of the leaders are new recruits to Nature Conservancy, having been attracted to the movement by formation of the chapter.

Nature Conservancy has moved and now occupies quarters at 4200 22nd Street, Northeast, Washington 18, D. C. Color printing of this issue of NATURE CONSERVATION NEWS was done some time ago and consequently shows the old address and the Board of Governors as it was constituted prior to the annual meeting.

HONORARY MEMBERSHIP CONFERRED

In recognition of his tireless efforts on behalf of nature preservation, Dr. Albert Moore Reese, professor emeritus of zoology at West Virginia University, was elected to honorary membership by the Nature Conservancy at the Gainesville meeting. Dr. Reese, at the age of 82, actively continues his life-long interest in conservation and the protection of wildlife.

Dr. Reese has for many years been a leader in West Virginia nature preservation activities, working with Nature Conservancy, the West Virginia Academy of Science, and other organizations.

Between the years 1907 and 1946 Dr. Reese was professor of zoology at West Virginia University, having previously occupied teaching positions in high school, Allegheny College, and Syracuse University. He received his A.B. degree from Johns Hopkins in 1892 and his Ph.D. degree from the same institution in 1907. In 1913 he was a member of the Smithsonian Institution expedition to the Orient and in 1919 of the Carnegie Institution expedition to South America. He is author of textbooks in embryology and in economic zoology, of a monograph on the alligator, and of an account of his travels in the Orient, as well as of many papers, chiefly on reptiles. He has been a member of many scientific organizations and was for years a regular attendant and participant in their meetings. For years also he was regular in his summer visits and research at the Marine Biological Laboratory. Through his efforts an excellent small museum of natural history was established and developed at West Virginia University. On his retirement in 1946, Dr. Reese was honored by an enthusiastic tribute by alumni, students, colleagues, and friends for his distinguished accomplishments and rare attributes as teacher, researcher, citizen, and man.

Dr. Reese was a pioneer in West Virginia in his forthright attacks on the once common "vermin" killing contests which powerful groups of then uninformed sportsmen sponsored. Through his constant, fervent, and reasoned advocacy of conservation in his classes, in public speeches, and in writings, he exerted strong influence in spreading appreciation of conservation problems and principles.

Typical of Dr. Reese's devotion to worthy causes and the service of the communities in which he has lived is his continued contribution of what seems to be unfailing energy and activity to the W. Va. Tuberculosis Association, of which he is the head and which he helped to found many years ago. No one who knows Dr. Reese, even though he be unaware of his work for conservation, can doubt the appropriateness of the honor which the Nature Conservancy has conferred on him.

The Nature Conservancy

Population and Nature Preservation Scholarship, 1955-56

A scholarship of $500, for graduate study in the field of conservation-human population relations during the 1955-56 academic year, will be awarded to a student whose application is judged most promising. Any candidate for an advanced degree may apply, provided his chosen thesis subject includes as a major concern some aspect of the relationship between natural area preservation and the increasing pressure of human population.

THE PROBLEM

The wild aspects of the landscape are an essential feature of human environment. Our heritage of wild nature provides us with scenic beauty, an inspirational background for cultural development, and a tremendous reservoir of materials for scientific study and development as useful resources. The pressure of increasing human population threatens the existence of natural and wilderness areas, as well as affecting many other aspects of human welfare. Nature Conservancy offers this scholarship as an aid to further public awareness of this threat and to help increase our knowledge of how it may be combated.

Within the scope of this problem the choice of subjects is wide. Those concentrating in conservation, biology, wildlife management, public health, sociology, economics, city planning, history, or related fields will each approach the problem from a different angle. This is encouraged since the ultimate solution will depend upon the application of knowledge from all these fields. The essential purpose of the award is to stimulate new approaches to the problem.

APPLICATION

The applicant should submit an outline of his proposed thesis. The outline should be brief and in keeping with good academic procedure. In addition he should submit relevant information about himself and addresses of several references including the professor under whom he is studying.

The application and the outline should reach Nature Conservancy by April 1, 1955.

CONDITIONS OF AWARD

This will be a grant to aid the student in continuing in his chosen field of study. It is to be given with the condition that the student carry on the study through at least one academic year at the university of his choice. It will be possible to modify the submitted outline in the course of the study as long as the essence of the investigation remains the same. The grant will be transmitted to the student in four equal installments during the school year upon receipt of reports endorsed by the student's major professor certifying that the study is in progress. Students receiving other financial support are eligible for the award.

This grant is made possible through the generosity of Dr. Conrad Chapman of Boston, Massachusetts, a member of the Board of Governors of Nature Conservancy. Full information on the aims and activities of Nature Conservancy will be sent on request.

NATURE CONSERVANCY *4200 22nd Street, Northeast* *Washington 18, D.C.*

METTLER'S WOODS

In the July 1952 issue, *Nature Conservation News* helped open the campaign to save Mettler's Woods, a 65 acre tract not far from Rutgers University in New Jersey. Today, thanks to *Life* magazine, people all over the country are intimately acquainted with this area and its living creatures. *Life* for November 8 carried as a feature article "*The Woods Near Home*", an excellent ecological portrayal of Mettler's Woods. With a series of 2-page spreads captioned *THE RUSH OF SPRING, THE FOREST DWELLERS, THE WOODLAND STREAM, THE FULLNESS OF SUMMER, THE LIVING SOIL, THE WINGED WOODS, THE FIRES OF AUTUMN, THE SLEEP OF WINTER,* and *OF TIME AND THE FOREST, Life* has done a monumental job of depicting in text, color photos, and paintings, the wonders of this deciduous forest woodland. The article gives evidence that the biologists of Rutgers effectively guided and counseled its production. We are happy that the Nature Conservancy had a hand in recommending Mettler's Woods to *Life* for the subject of this essay in its *THE WORLD WE LIVE IN* series.

At last report from the hard-working Citizens Scientific and Historical Committee for the Preservation of Mettler's Woods, the Mettler's Woods purchase fund stood at a total of $48,200, leaving $26,800 still needed to assure preservation of the tract.

CHALLENGE OF THE OCEAN

To give you a view of the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association, we present the following report on a meeting held in Boston on May 20 and 21. This report is by John W. Brainerd of Springfield College, Massachusetts representative of Nature Conservancy.

At the annual meeting of the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association, specialists of various disciplines came together and presented a fascinating picture of man's social problems as he uses his mite of machinery against the might of the ocean. Conservancy members are urged to become familiar with the work of this organization, which publishes *Shore and Beach* semi-annually (1060 Broad Street, Newark 2, N. J.) including reports of its meetings in greater detail than is possible here.

The opening of the meeting with a memorial service for their late president J. Spencer Smith was an impressive testimonial to what one man can do in gathering people to join in an effective program of conservation. There followed papers on various techniques for stabilizing sandy shores subject to heavy wave action. Evidence was graphically shown of the sudden deterioration of beaches by severe storms such as the one in early November, 1953, which removed most of the sand from certain important beaches in the Northeast. Special emphasis was placed on the value of beach filling by hydraulically dredged sand in those communities economically dependent on the shore recreation industry, as in New Jersey. The sand with its mobile particles is a remarkable absorber of the energy of pounding waves, thus helping preserve the breakwaters, jetties, groins, bulkheads, and sea walls which engineers build to keep the sand in place and protect shore property. The need for such formidable engineering projects was well demonstrated by statistics showing the tremendous demand for shore recreation by a fast growing number of people.

A luncheon address prepared by Director Conrad Wirth of the National Park Service alluded briefly to federal and state owned shorelands, including 400 miles of Oregon coast all publicly owned except for 30 miles; the outstanding Indiana Dunes area; and the Cape Hatteras National Seashore Area whose purchase is progressing. In the latter area, a special effort is being made to keep the landscape natural so far as possible, with tourists depending upon neighboring towns for accomodations. Mr. Wirth's paper pointed out that in spite of years of far-sighted work in setting aside beaches, the supply is inadequate, with people being turned away in hot weather and with the natural vegetation taking a beating from excessive pressure.

The afternoon session was devoted to New England beaches. It was introduced by a discussion of the effects of off-shore bars and littoral currents upon the erosion and deposition of beaches on outer Cape Cod, an important oceanographic contribution by a geology professor.

An architectural planner followed with a stimulating description of current problems and methods in developing the Massachusetts Ocean Beach Program, including use of native dune vegetation in landscaping. First population studies were presented, with a map showing where people lived who could make "one-day use" of Massachusetts coastal beaches; there were 4 million such people in eastern New England in 1950 and will be about 5 million in 1980. Statistics also indicated the increase in number of cars per person, the increase of urban over rural population, and the increase in year-'round coastal living (resulting from more retired people, better commuting facilities, and greater mobility of consumer goods). The resulting competition for land use between inland urbanites and coastal residents is evinced by high land values and lack of adequate public access.

One significant point made was that the limit of public beach development is not set by the number of people which a beach can accomodate but by the number of cars which can be parked. In the site planning for bathing pavilions, an effort is being made to leave large, natural areas to safeguard the scenic effect. Also in building pavilions, long two-story structures are recommended with long horizontal lines in tune with the horizon and sweep of beach; the ground floor should be built essentially without walls between its piers, leaving a relatively unbroken visible expanse of sea and sand.

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY
607 G STREET, SOUTHEAST
WASHINGTON 3, D. C.

The Nature Conservancy is an independent member-governed organization dedicated to saving America's heritage of wild nature. Its specific object is to preserve natural areas as "living museums" of the primeval wilderness. Such tracts are precious for their scientific, educational, and esthetic values. They also afford a home for the multitude of kinds of living things that would otherwise vanish from the earth, destroyed by our civilization.

The work of our organization began in 1917 under the direction of a committee of the Ecological Society of America. In 1946 the Ecologists Union was formed to take over these tasks. In 1950 its name was changed to the Nature Conservancy.

We, the members of the Nature Conservancy, invite you to join with us in this work. Membership is open to both individuals and organizations. Your contribution is an allowable income tax deduction.

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Continued from preceding page:

A field trip by bus visiting several New England beaches took place the second day --in a nor'easter. It was a memorable experience for the Conservancy representative, hearing the engineers, landscape architects, contractors, professional recreationists, and political administrators pitting their ideas against the elements.

The general impression left by this most stimulating meeting was that Conservancy members should be presenting their points of view more actively in beach development. The engineers and recreation administrators and those who are cooperating with them are doing a wonderful job not only in protecting shorelands from the oceans (and lakes), but also in thoughtfully handling awe-inspiring numbers of urbanites who seek both cleanliness and godliness in that wonderful ecotone between sea and the land.

There is a great challenge to conservationists to use beaches as a locus for educating masses of city folk who perhaps never go to another natural environment. There should be a naturalist on duty at many public beaches. He could help people discover the recreational advantages of the adjacent marshes so often looked upon only as a mosquito-breeding liability. He could help sensitize people to the facts and mysteries of the migration of shore birds. He could help the children digging pools in the sand and making dams to protect castles from the incoming tide, all the while teaching them about soil and water and their role in life. The possibilities are almost endless. Each bathing pavilion should have at least one display case for seasonal exhibits of life along the shore, and a bulletin board. This could also hold colorful displays illustrating the water cycle, erosion, and other natural processes exemplified so much better at the beach than in a cement-clad city (or a modern schoolroom, even).

One has only to watch the behavior of people en masse to realize how unsensitive most of them are to many aspects of the shore environment. They bring their city amusements with them: their beach balls and battery radios, their bodies and their beer. To be sure, they have a wonderful time, but by their thoughtlessness they often spoil the environment for others. They get wet and tanned --or drowned or sunburnt, depending upon their understanding of their natural environment. Here at the edge of the ocean we are confronted not only by the physical problems of the sea but also by the mental problems of man. Thus is created an almost unrivaled opportunity for conservation education.

The American Shore and Beach Preservation Association deserves all the help it can get for its broad and important program. Many Conservancy members ought to be in a position to help with the challenge at the edge of the ocean.